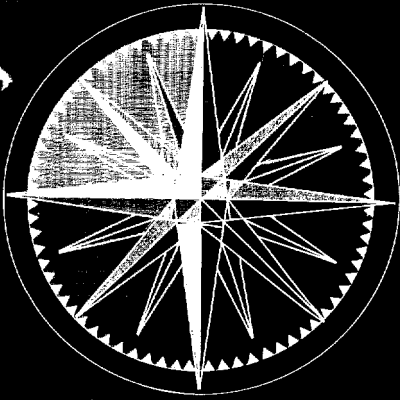


**SECRET**

Approved For Release 2008/02/01 : CIA-RDP79-00927A004800120002-7



30 April 1965

OCI No. 0278/65A

Copy No. 55

# SPECIAL REPORT

DEVELOPMENTS IN SOVIET AIRBORNE AND AMPHIBIOUS FORCES

DIA review  
completed.

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

25X1

**SECRET**

GROUP 1 Excluded from automatic  
downgrading and declassification

**Page Denied**

**SECRET**

30 April 1965

**DEVELOPMENTS IN SOVIET AIRBORNE AND AMPHIBIOUS FORCES**

One of the prominent trends in Soviet military developments in recent years has been a growing emphasis on airborne and amphibious forces. In building up these forces, the Soviets have acquired the nucleus for a capability for rapidly establishing a military presence beyond the borders of the bloc. They are still far from achieving anything comparable in size or capability to the US Strike Command, but the present trend suggests that as time goes on Soviet military planners will have an increasingly effective option for rapid deployment of troops and equipment to support Communist objectives in limited, local, or cold-war situations in many parts of the world.

Purpose of the Forces

The growing Soviet attention to mobile military forces was exemplified by the most recent Warsaw Pact exercise--in Bulgaria last September--which departed from the past orientation toward ground forces to stage the most extensive test of Soviet airborne and amphibious capabilities ever conducted outside the USSR.

A primary mission of Soviet airborne and amphibious forces has been--and probably will continue to be--immediate and large-scale exploitation of the results of tactical nuclear attacks in a general war situation. There seems little doubt, however, that the Soviets are attracted by the possibilities of using these elements for more limited actions and breaking the near monopoly of the West in this area.

A number of Soviet articles have been published showing interest in Western use of amphibious and airborne forces in limited and local war as well as in cold-war situations, suggesting a growing desire to develop such capabilities for Soviet forces. For example, an article in a Kiev newspaper in February, under the by-line of an authoritative writer on US military affairs, cited the effectiveness of Western paratroop operations as military "first aid." He wrote that the tasks airborne troops can accomplish are varied and numerous and "that is why great attention is devoted (in the West) to the organization and training of these troops."

Airborne Troops

Airborne troops earmarked for limited actions would probably be drawn from the seven

**SECRET**

SOVIET AIRBORNE TROOPS IN TRAINING DESIGNED FOR  
LIMITED ACTION OPERATIONS IN VARIOUS TYPES OF TERRAIN



650401 2D

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

airborne rifle divisions generally located on the periphery of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet airborne divisions, which may total as many as 40,000 men, have undergone increasingly intensive training in recent years. The number of parachute jumps made in the 1963 training year was four times as high as the 100,000 claimed for 1961.

In addition, small airborne groups could be organized from Soviet troops in East Germany who have received airborne training. A continuing program of paradrop training in East Germany indicates that the Soviets are developing a substantial airborne capability there.

#### Airlift Capabilities

The major limiting factor in Soviet airborne operations is not manpower but airlift capability. A huge effort has gone into providing new aircraft for moving troops and equipment over long distances. According to Chief Marshal of Aviation K. Vershinin, the role and missions of military transport have increased and "this is why it is being developed at a much higher rate than some of the other components of the air forces." He added that the military transport aircraft ensure rapid movement of troops

and provide the important element of surprise.

The workhorse of VTA/Airborne units--those units of Military Transport Aviation (VTA) designated for airborne operations--is the four-engine turboprop AN-12 (Cub). The continuing build-up of the AN-12 fleet has more than doubled the total airlift capacity in the past four years. Over 425 of these aircraft now are assigned to VTA/Airborne units.

In addition to the AN-12s, more than 125 smaller two-engine AN-8 transports, under the operational control of military district and groups of forces commanders, are used for airborne operations.

25X1  
25X1

The current fleet of VTA/Airborne transports could probably airlift between one and two airborne divisions at one time, depending on the amount of equipment accompanying the troops, to a distance of up to about 1,500 miles in a two-way operation without refueling. If the aircraft were able to land and refuel at their destination, this distance would double. A sustained airlift with shuttle flights could be carried out to supplement forces airlifted in the initial movement. Also, the Soviet civil

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

air fleet could be used to augment military transports.

The AN-12 came into operational use in 1959 and is a vast improvement over its predecessors. Its rear-loading doors enable it to accommodate equipment up to 9.5 feet wide, 8 feet high, and 44 feet long, and it has facilities (including breathing oxygen) for up to 91 paratroops. Early models did not have an impressive range when carrying a heavy load, but later models are believed to have a larger fuel capacity which permits a range of as much as 3,100 miles with a ten-ton payload.

As capable as the AN-12 is, however, it still puts severe limits on the size of military equipment which can be airlifted and the distance at which airborne operations can be conducted. Further major improvement in Soviet airlift capabilities will require a transport with much greater range and capacity, particularly if the Soviets hope to create a potential for extensive operations far from the homeland.

A large new aircraft to meet these increased requirements is believed to be under development. In February a military attaché saw what is probably the prototype of this aircraft in Kiev where the

Antonov design bureau, which also designed the AN-12, is located. The attaché reported that it dwarfed two AN-12s parked nearby. His description indicates it is a rear-loading transport with a high, straight wing, four turboprop engines, a wide squat fuselage, and twin tails. Whether it also has front-loading doors--very desirable in an assault transport--was not determined.

This new aircraft may well be a prototype of the AN-22

[redacted] a Soviet general stated that when the AN-22 becomes operational, it will be possible to transport entire motorized rifle and tank divisions and missile and other units by air. If prototype testing is under way, as the Kiev sighting suggests, the new transport could begin appearing in operational units in 1967 or 1968.

In addition to improving their transport fleet, the Soviets are also expected to seek to extend their airlift potential outside the bloc by increased efforts to obtain landing, overflight, or logistic support rights in countries which are recipients of Soviet aid.

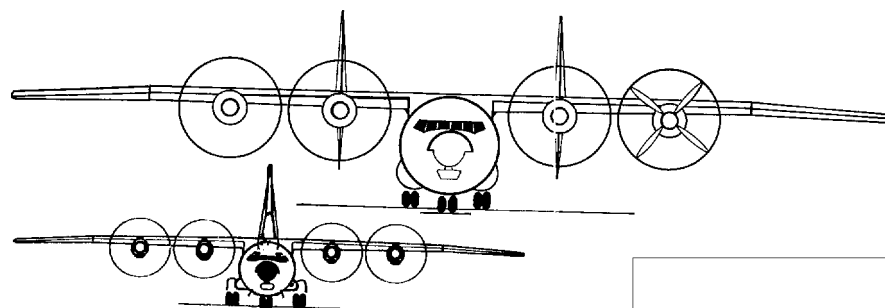
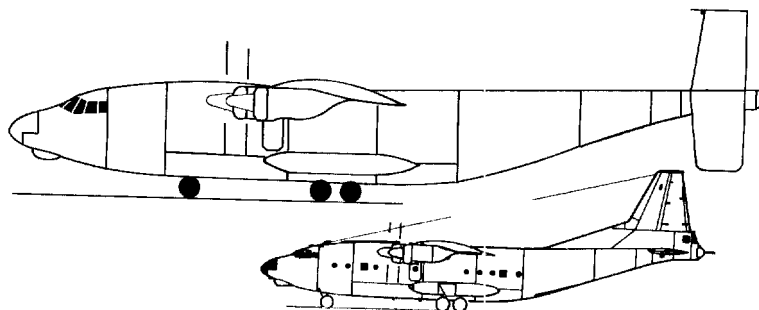
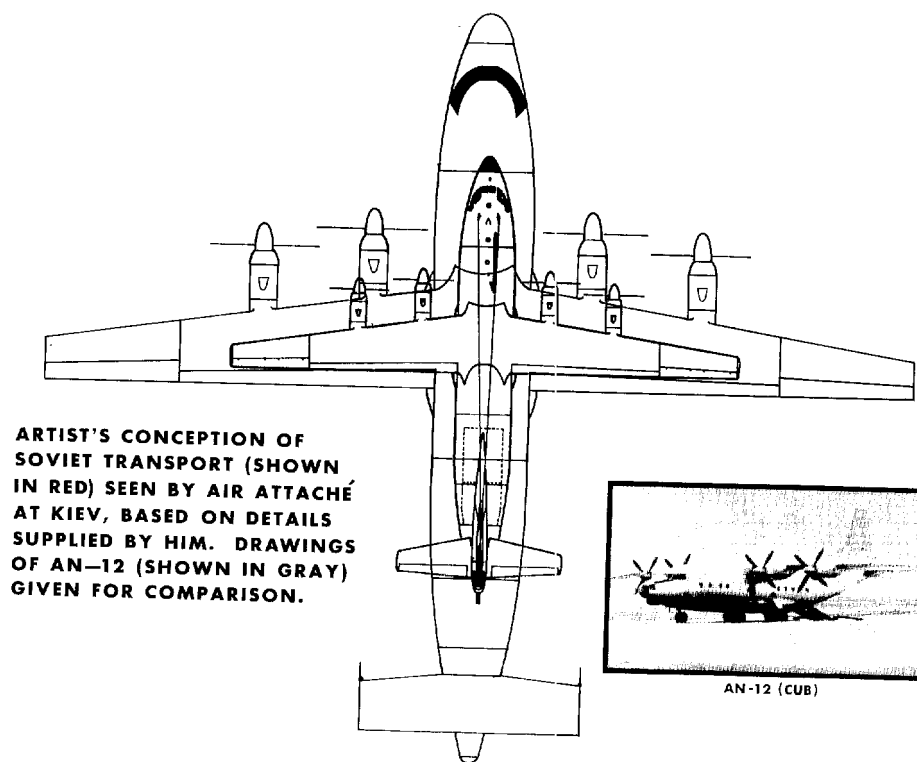
#### Marines

The re-establishment of the Soviet Marine Corps, apparently in 1963, is one of the latest

25X1

25X1

**SECRET**



650401 2A

25X1

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

steps in the recent improvement of bloc amphibious capabilities. Other recent measures include the construction of improved landing craft since 1961 and the assignment of a larger role to amphibious operations in Warsaw Pact exercises since 1962. Also notable has been the appearance of frequent articles on amphibious warfare in Soviet and satellite military publications since 1963.

In a general war, the primary missions of these forces would probably be to spearhead the seizure of the Danish Straits in the Baltic area, the Turkish Straits in the Black Sea area, and possibly the La Perouse Strait in the Pacific. However, they also have the mission of supporting the planned high rate of advance of Soviet ground troops in coastal areas by forcing passage of estuaries, sounds, channels, and other water barriers, and carrying out landings in the enemy rear.

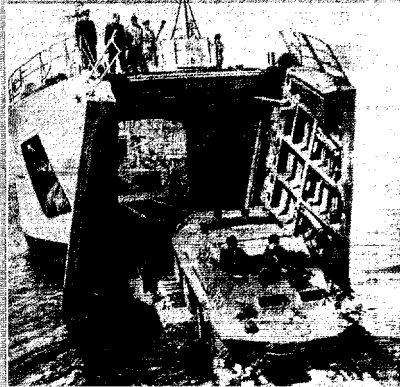
Further impetus to the development of amphibious capabilities was probably given by the US amphibious landings in Lebanon in 1958. The Soviet Navy was reportedly astonished by the ease and speed of the operation, and its cold war usefulness was certainly not lost on the Soviets.

Starting in 1963, army motorized rifle regiments, possibly those previously used in amphibious exercises, were apparently converted into marine brigades of three or four battalions in the Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific Fleet areas. There is probably no more than one brigade in each of these fleets at present.

**SECRET**

**SECRET****SOVIET MARINES IN AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE TRAINING.**

Photo at top left depicts armored personnel carriers being loaded aboard an MP-8 - class medium landing ship.



650401-2C

### Amphibious Assault Lift Capabilities

Prior to 1958, the Soviet amphibious assault lift capabilities were primarily limited to small landing craft. Since 1958, at least four new classes of larger Soviet-built landing vessels have appeared. The most impressive of these are the MP-8 - class medium landing ship, which can carry 400 troops and their equipment, or ten tanks; and the MP-6 - class cargo landing ship, which can

carry 1,100 tons of cargo. The Soviets are estimated to have 18 of the MP-8s, 15 of which are in the Baltic, and 11 of the MP-6s, eight of which are in the Black Sea. Since 1961, three new classes of larger landing craft have been built by the satellites. These are the East German Labo-100 - class utility landing craft and Robbe-class tank landing ship, and the Polish Polnocny-class tank landing ship. The Polnocny-class carries 300 troops and their equipment, or six medium tanks. Of the 13 or more built

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

so far, eight have been turned over to the Soviets for use in the Baltic and the Black Sea.

Although there has been increased attention to landing craft construction in recent years, Soviet amphibious lift capabilities are currently limited to a maximum of two marine brigades in the Baltic, one marine brigade in the Black Sea, and only about one battalion in the Pacific and Northern Fleet areas. In the Baltic, East Germany and Poland together can provide an additional amphibious assault lift for slightly more than one marine brigade. However, this would probably be used by elements of the newly created Polish Assault Landing Division. In the Black Sea, Bulgaria can provide an additional amphibious assault lift for one and one half battalions.

Soviet doctrine calls for combining a helicopter-borne assault with any amphibious assault on an enemy beach. Parachutists may also be dropped farther inland. Thus far, however, the Soviets have failed to provide themselves with any ships capable of carrying and launching more than a few helicopters. The largest Soviet helicopter, the MI-6 (Hook), has a one-way range of about 400 miles and a round-trip capability of about 200 miles. If the Soviets desire to carry out combined helicopter-amphibious operations over long ranges in limited or general nuclear war--as they appear

to--ships capable of carrying a significant number of helicopters should begin appearing in their order of battle. Lacking both aircraft carriers and an in-flight refueling capability for fighters, however, the Soviets would have great difficulty in providing even limited air cover for such long-range operations.

Recent Soviet military writing shows a high degree of interest in the development of air-cushion vehicles for amphibious forces. The Soviets are impressed by the high speed of such vehicles and their potential ability to carry troops ashore over natural and man-made obstacles to practically any location at any time of year.

#### Sealift Capabilities

Perhaps more significant is the improvement in over-all Soviet sealift capabilities. Most of the new merchant ships which the USSR is building or buying have sufficient speed, endurance, and capacity to contribute to a military sealift capability. Assuming only a



POLNOCHNY-CLASS TANK LANDING SHIP

25X1

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

70-percent availability of the Soviet merchant ships presently assigned to Black Sea or Pacific ports, five motorized rifle divisions could be lifted on an amphibious operation. Two and three divisions could probably be lifted by the Northern and Baltic Sea merchant fleets respectively.

However, the Soviets have not yet developed the sea escort capabilities necessary for long-range military sealift in a general war situation. Thus, the current major military con-

cern arises from the capability of the rapidly expanding merchant fleet to deliver supplies to insurgent or "national liberation movements" in other countries and to friendly forces overseas. The clandestine introduction of Soviet MRBM missiles into Cuba in 1962, for example, would have been difficult if not impossible without the use of newly acquired large-hatch merchant ships. Since 1961, the number of such ships in the Soviet merchant fleet has jumped from three to nearly 60.

25X1

\* \* \*

**SECRET**

***SECRET***

***SECRET***